

Montgomery County Council Meeting

February 7, 2023

Testimony of Nicholas Bassey, Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator

Good evening. I am Nicholas Bassey, Paint Branch Cluster Coordinator for the Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA). We represent over 50,000 members across 192 county PTAs. The Paint Branch Cluster is in District 5, and serves approximately 7,700 students across nine vibrant schools: Paint Branch High School and the eight elementary and middle schools feeding into it. We are proud of our fast-growing, diverse, and politically active part of the county, and are grateful that the Superintendent's budget recommendation includes capital investments in our schools - especially Burtonsville and Greencastle Elementary Schools and Benjamin Banneker Middle School.

Burtonsville Elementary School was approved for an addition about ten years ago. This project - despite discussions with architects and consultations with the entire staff - failed to break ground. As I mentioned during last year's hearing, their space crisis has continued to worsen without any relief from the Council. Their cafeteria fits only one grade level at a time, for example, resulting in six lunch periods. It is also their only gathering space, but because it hosts lunch from 10:40 a.m. until 2:10 p.m., it is generally unavailable for enrichment activities and assemblies. This lunch schedule also creates staffing issues: paraeducators must trade instructional time for lunch duty. We hope you will address these issues by funding the MCPS-recommended construction of a new Burtonsville Elementary School now, rather than in the unpredictable later years of the current CIP.

Greencastle Elementary was also approved for an addition to address their space crisis. They now have ten portable classrooms, two of which just opened last year. This clearly demonstrates that their facility is inadequate. They also have only four sets of bathrooms for **730** students. We request that construction of their addition proceed without delay, bringing about 200 fourth and fifth graders out of portables and back under the main roof.

I recently walked the halls of Banneker Middle School with staff and noted myriad age-related CIP issues: apparently unrepairable leaks in the roof; quasi-functional water heaters; regular plumbing issues and sewage backups; bucking basement walls; and the list goes on. We are glad that Banneker has finally been approved for a feasibility study for a major capital project, and request that this proceed without delay.

We ask you not to forget about these stark facilities challenges and ask you to fund these projects without delay. The age of these schools creates plumbing, security, space, technology, and numerous other challenges not encountered in other parts of our county despite recent discussions about equity. I'll close with this thought: equity - especially in the CIP - is not about equal distribution of available resources. It is reallocation based on both historical treatment and present needs. Our part of the County has historically been underfunded in relation to our needs. Please work with us to address them by viewing our requests through an equity lens - investing in capital projects via permanent revenue streams like recordation or impact taxes. Thank you for your time, attention, and action for our schools without further delay.